



## Planners envision down-sized South Mountain bypass

by **Kerry Fehr-Snyder** - Jan. 27, 2009 07:30 AM  
The Arizona Republic

Support appears to be growing for downsizing the proposed **South Mountain Freeway** by turning it into a parkway instead.

If the South Mountain Freeway is downsized to a parkway, it would mean fewer interchanges and fewer lanes. It also would preclude expanding the number of lanes to 10 from six as originally planned.

The proposal comes as freeway planners look for ways to balance a \$5.3 billion shortfall in the 20-year transportation plan. The shortfall comes from falling sales tax revenue in Proposition 400 combined with rising construction costs.

"We're down 14 of the past 15 months" in revenue, **Eric Anderson**, transportation director for the Maricopa Association of Governments, told members of its Transportation Policy Committee last week.

"We haven't found a bottom of the downturn yet."

The 22-mile South Mountain Freeway in Ahwatukee and west Phoenix is still in the planning stage. One of the biggest expenses

is for the freeway's right-of-way land, which is estimated to cost \$1.1 billion of the \$2.6 billion price tag.

Those costs would allow the **Arizona Department of Transportation** to buy 250 to 500 homes and a church that lay in the path of the proposed route along Pecos Road. The freeway would cut through a portion of the South Mountain Preserve and connect to 55th Avenue before linking to Interstate 10 in the west Valley.

"It would be a stretch to build the facility as its being thought of today," Anderson said.

MAG has not yet determined how much building a parkway would cost compared with a freeway, although it has developed some estimates.

The freeway would cost between \$90 million and \$120 million per mile and carry 140,000 vehicles per day, according to MAG estimates. A parkway would cost \$20 million to \$40 million per mile and carry 90,000 vehicles per day.

"What we find very compelling about these facilities ... is the crash rate is significantly lower," said Bob Hazlett, MAG's senior engineer.

The average crash rate per 1 million miles on a parkway is 0.5 compared with 1.7 on a

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freeway, according to MAG data gathered from other cities with parkways.

"This may be a blessing in disguise," Anderson said.

MAG's Transportation Policy Committee, which is comprised of Valley mayors and other representatives, are trying to recommend cuts in the 20-year transportation plan.

"This is a more dynamic process than we expected in the summer," Anderson said. "Some of these decisions, say on a South Mountain Parkway, are really permanent. We want to make sure we're doing the right thing today and for the future."

Goodyear Mayor James Cavanaugh said he likes the idea of a parkway.

"The political issues down there are so substantial," he said. "I fear we'd be in court for years."

Freeway foes have said they plan to file a suit to block construction of the corridor if it is approved by the [Federal Highway Administration](#) and funded by MAG.

Chad Blostone, an Ahwatukee resident involved in the debate, said he doesn't know if a parkway would appease opponents or make the threat of a lawsuit go away.

"I'm not strictly taking a 'no build' position," he said. "But I think the parkway would need to be engineered so that the costs of building it are offset by the benefits of improving traffic flow."



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